

Rural Network News



No. 34

April 2007

Make sure it is God's trumpet you are blowing. If it is only yours it won't wake the dead; it will simply disturb the neighbours.

W. Ian Thomas

Rural Network News aims to share ideas for ministry in neighbourhood and land-based communities.
Te kaitiakitanga, te manaakitanga, te kotahitanga.

Please share this newsletter with others you think may be interested. Feel free to make photocopies.
Responses to items always welcome.

Wisdom about Floods

A Gospel Voice in the Waipu Community

At Church on the first Sunday of April many people shared the events of previous Thursday's flooding.

We are at the southern end of the flood area and only had 380mm of rain over 12-14 hours, unlike the deluge further north. All the same, when I took some children home up one of the valleys because their parents got trapped in Whangarei and saw the water coming off the hills in sheets, it was awe inspiring and frightening.

Between 3.30pm and 7.30pm our rivers rose six to seven metres. Some of our parish folk were flooded. Farmers lost kilometres of fencing, and also stock, vehicles, pumps, silage and hay.

There were huge slips, roads disappeared and a large irrigation dam overtopped and breached.

With the dam breached, a German couple in a camper van who tried to cross a bridge over a stream you can normally step over found themselves swept away. They got out before the van disappeared. It has been found one kilometre downstream full of mud. There are many community stories of close calls like that.

As a parish we have a Community Issues and Ecology Workgroup that acts as our eyes and ears on lots of things including local development and sub-divisions. We have made submissions opposing a couple of sub-divisions because our church records that go back 150 years record some big floods. Developers don't seem to take much notice of history.

We expressed concerns about a particular river-side sub-division where the earth works have just begun and rock has filled a natural flood channel to allow them to have more sections.

The whole lot went under – and for us this was a 50-year event not a 150-year one like that experienced further north.

We actually had a bigger flood here in 1997, caused by a cloud burst at the head of one of the valleys. Needless to say we are going back to the local council to say "told you so" and ask them: "what are you going to do now?"

Peter Dunn, Waipu, Northland

Holy Cow

"Some people want to see God with their eyes as they see a cow and to love him as they love their cow - they love their cow for the milk and cheese and profit it makes them. This is how it is with people who love God for the sake of outward wealth or inward comfort. They do not rightly love God when they love him for their own advantage. Indeed, I tell you the truth, any object you have on your mind, however good, will be a barrier between you and the inmost truth."

Meister Eckhart

"Cry of the Heart"

International Rural Church Association
Conference: Manitoba, Canada

3-9 July 2007

"Let us worship God and find Christ's leading –
together"

A number of New Zealanders have taken up this invitation and are planning to attend IRCA2007 at Brandon University in Manitoba, Canada. The following are biographical snapshots we have received:

David and Sue Speedy are ex-sheep and beef farmers from Southern Hawkes Bay. Three and a half years ago they retired to Dannevirke but kept their association with All Saints Parish at Weber, half way between the Ruahine ranges and their farm on the coast. Three years ago Weber became a 'Local Shared Ministry' Parish with five people making up the team for providing worship services. David and two others have been subsequently ordained, while Sue provides the music and is Bishop's Warden. Sue enjoys playing tennis and walking, David plays golf and enjoys fishing. david.speedy@xtra.co.nz

Janice Purdie is recently retired and developing her interest in hospital chaplaincy work and pastoral visiting. She lives in Paeroa, a rural servicing centre for a largely dairying area some 150km south east of Auckland. Before her retirement she was a lay church worker in the Paeroa Cooperating church where she is still an active member. At the conference Janice hopes to share with people with concerns for the growth and active involvement of the Christian church in rural communities. janmp41@xtra.co.nz

Christina Morunga (nee Brocket) is married to Ben and loves her large stepfamily including 23 mokopuna. Ben supports her in her study as a Presbyter and in ministering in the North Hokianga church and community. They farm beef and enjoy horse-work. Christina is a Nurse Educator serving over 300 people with diabetes through ten clinics around the Hokianga, and co-ordinates Women's Health for Hokianga Health. She co-hosted the Trans-Tasman Rural Ministry Conference in 2000 and looks forward to networking at Brandon.

Robyn McPhail works as the Union Parish minister in the Kaeo and Kerikeri communities in Northland. At Brandon she knows she'll meet up with old friends and make new ones and get a chance to pursue study interests in sustainable rural communities. She'll also get to hand over the IRCA Chairperson job to someone else. chirmac@xtra.co.nz

Beverley and Michael Deverell: Michael is semi-retired from a lifetime in farming, the last 40 years being in a Maori community which gives them a special affinity with things Maori as well as rural. They are both involved in voluntary community work, as well as having been part of the Local Shared Ministry support team of our Bay of Islands Uniting Parish, Beverley having pastoral responsibility for 12 years. They work ecumenically in their local communities, with Churches Together in Northland and were part of the hosting of the Trans-Tasman conference in 2000. They have a family of five and 14 grandchildren. bevdev@paradise.net.nz

Noel Dalley who lives at Brookside has always lived in rural Canterbury. Now a retired farmer living on their son's dairy farm, Noel is an ex-president of provincial Federated Farmers and a member of Canterbury Rural Support. He worships at Brookside Community Church, is a parish councillor, property convenor and Joint Regional Committee executive and liaison person. Noel wants to learn more about locally provided ministry, how ordained clergy enable people to be ministers and how other rural parishes are being the 'church'. mnwdalley@xtra.co.nz

Garth Cant is a geographer at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand and a Methodist Lay Preacher. He has interests in rural communities, Indigenous land rights, and creation theology. He is a member of the Canterbury Rural Ministry Unit and has been involved in rural ministry conferences in New Zealand, Australia and Canada. garth.cant@canterbury.ac.nz

Sue Bedford is a specialist relief primary school teacher, wife of Chris and member of Ellesmere Cooperating Parish, with involvement in music at Dunsandel. They went to a rural ministry conference in Ontario when they were living in Canada in 1987. She'd like to see what changes there have been since then and how they relate to life in New Zealand. cksrbedford@clear.net.nz

Chris Bedford, husband of Sue, is Transition Minister for Ellesmere Cooperating Parish, on the Canterbury Plains. The parish has four centres - Leeston, Dunsandel, Southbridge, and Brookside. He wants to visit a Prairies community and see how its life and faith compares with that in rural Canterbury. Also meet other rural church people from around the world, develop some contacts. And have fun. cksrbedford@clear.net.nz

More information about the conference can be found at www.irca-canada.org or contact Catherine Christie cchristie@sasktel.net.



There is still time to register. Note especially the pre-conference option of "Conference Scattered". Participants are invited to enjoy the hospitality of a local rural church community for up to a week prior to the conference.

IRCA international contacts: Dave Ruesink druesink@tamu.edu, Secretary of IRCA, or Robyn McPhail, Chairperson, at chirmac@xtra.co.nz (ph: 09 401 7554, fax: 09 4017555).

Holidays for Drought-Stricken Aussie Farmers

A holidays-for-Aussies project has been set up by Federated Farmers to give New Zealand holidays to Australian farming families affected by the drought in Australia. With this project people who have offered to host an Australian are contacted directly by an Australian farmer. Families from drought areas have now begun booking their flights to come to New Zealand. The project is supported by Australia's National Farmers Federation and Jetstar Airlines, which is offering 100 free return flights to Christchurch.

The programme will provide Australian farmers with some respite from the worst drought on record in the form of a holiday many could not afford to take this past holiday season. The joint initiative was spearheaded by a unanimous vote late last year by Federated Farmers to support Australia's drought-stricken farmers. Recently New Zealand farmers have been volunteering their holiday homes to farmers who wish to travel to New Zealand.

Travel is being arranged from February to the end of June. New Zealand farmers wanting to offer accommodation, particularly near Christchurch, should contact Federated Farmers on 0800 327 646.

http://www.fedfarm.org.nz/media_release/2007_02_08.html for more information

Nicola Robertson, Methven, Mid-Canterbury

Changing Seasons Challenging Times

A Moving Trans-Tasman Event Announced for 2008

Planning is well underway for the next Trans Tasman Rural Conference which will be held in the top of the South Island from 7 -11 April 2008.

The vision is for a moving conference which will span from Marlborough, Lake Rotoiti and the Waimea Plains near Nelson. The journey will not only take in the sights and aspects of each region and its ministries but will also allow ample time for networking and individual discussion and exploration as we move around on buses.

Beginning in Marlborough on the East Coast we will be looking at the unique agri-business ventures and ministry challenges, complemented with a cultural adventure on the Omaka Marae.

Then moving through to the Nelson Lakes National Park we will look at conservation issues, High Country Farming and living and working in an isolated community.

The last days will be spent at the Teapot Valley Christian Camp on the Waimea Plains where there will be workshops, conversation groups and plenary sessions.

This conference is held every 4 years and always proves to be on the cutting edge of best practice of Rural Ministry as it is run by rural people for rural people. Ask someone who has been to an earlier conference and you will find they are always beyond doubt the best Rural Church inspiration and training event.

If you want to know more, or you would like to contribute from afar with the planning and moulding of this event, contact Martin Harrison, rev.harrison@xtra.co.nz.

Country Churches

Icons, Faith Centres or Maintenance Headaches?

The Hawke's Bay Rural Ministry Unit (RMU) met to talk about rural faith but found instead discussion revolving around the viability of small rural churches, both the buildings and the people who worship in them.

Many such rural congregations and their 'mother church' leadership have been faced with issues such as:

- Because the local church is only infrequently used for worship is it worth maintaining it or is it better to close it?
- Might a policy of centralisation mean the demise of Christian life in small and out-of-the-way places? Historically, worship flourished there and would closing add to a growing local sense of failure?
- Or will centralisation mean bigger numbers, give a sense of solidarity, and of being part of a 'successful' church life?
- To what extent does the urban big-church experience add to or diminish the uniqueness of the small congregation country church? And how do we feel about the idea that people will inevitably make their own choices and travel to whatever church they feel comfortable with, anyway, whether town or country?
- In regions where there are numerous life-style blocks, given the rapid turnover of such populations, how does the rural church establish local support base and viable congregational life?
- Does smallness of numbers at worship enhance mutual support or, conversely, make people feel dispirited, as if upholding a lost cause?
- How do the office-holders and clergy foster local ownership of the building (with its maintenance needs) and generate leadership for worship and congregational life? And given that congregations are increasingly multi-denominational how do churches work through this sociological reality?
- Why is it that, when talk of closure is aired, the wider community rises up vigorously seek to

ensure their 'iconic' church building remains where it is?

RMU members related this discussion to questions of personal faith commitment and to mission to the wider community. We felt that:

- For some, attending church is a personal journey of spiritual discovery. They come for a living encounter with Christ and to deepen their own faith.
- Others come to worship to enjoy a time of togetherness, both in worship and afterwards meeting with neighbours and chatting over refreshments about all things rural. Church for them is a community-affirming experience.
- Some come because of long family associations with the building. They may be the local 'gate-keepers' who have inherited this role and exercise a benign oversight over all that happens in the local community and church. Also, the interior furniture, the Lord's Table, font, stain-glass window or a lectern, may have been given in memory of a past family member and thus gives them a familial and emotional link with the building.
- Still others come occasionally for rites of passage events – baptisms and blessings, admission to communion, confirmation, weddings, funerals and civic events such as ANZAC Day. They will be accompanied by urban family and friends for whom the small rural worship experience has a unique novelty quality to it.
- Where there is no longer a resident minister, how does the 'mother church' leadership encourage local people to assume worship and pastoral leadership roles? Many country folk already hold high profile roles in the wider community (on school boards, and rural and financial institutions). Where spiritual leadership is contemplated many hesitate or feel inadequate.

Because money is always needed for church maintenance, raising sufficient funds locally and in the wider parish can be a real financial strain on both local and parent church finances. (Thankfully we are not faced with the staggering challenge currently facing Canterbury Cathedral, UK. They are trying to raise \$150 million to save it from

collapse!) The issue is important for those with a stake in something familiar and dear to them.

Some RMU members felt that part of the future viability of the local church lies in church growth through accessible programmes such as 'Alpha' or Rob Harley's 'Journeys' series followed by a planned programme of continued nurture and support using the many resources now available. Also, the importance of Bible in Schools remained a key ingredient in keeping contact with the wider community, especially children, parents and teachers. The local school continues to be, in many areas, the most effective way for the local church to inform everyone of its activities.

All felt a strong commitment to the local small church, whether it be a dedicated church building or a local hall or home, along with a determination to ensure they remain in use.

(I recall one community hall in a remote country area of Eastland where a regular worshipper attended faithfully. Despite the fact she had children at prestigious boarding schools with their magnificent chapels, the local hall was a truly holy place for her, even if worship on a Sunday followed a Saturday night dance or party in the same building, and the smell of alcohol and cigarette smoke hung heavy in the air).

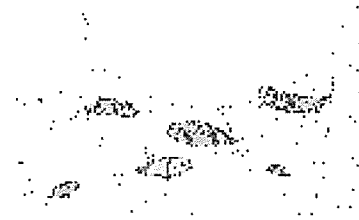
It was generally agreed that fostering a sense of local shareholding and ownership is an important step in moving away from threats of church closure. It also helps people to think about what their faith means for them and the church's ministry to the local community. Along with this must be a programme to train local leaders and affirm them in their new roles.

One expression of this ministry within the community was the appointment of one of the RMU members, Bruce Ellingham, to the regional Rural Support group whose role comes into its own in times of drought, flood etc. under the Government's Adverse Events Recovery programme.

Bill Bennett, Napier, Hawke's Bay

What lies behind us and what lies before us are inconsequential compared to what lies within us.

A Salutory Tale



There was an enthusiastic group of fisher folk who decided to form a club. They called it the Fisherfolk Club and in their statement of purpose they said the club was there to help fishers be more effective.

They built themselves a club house, and they decorated it with fish nets and pictures of fisher folk using nets, rod and reel, fly casting – all the many ways in which people catch fish.

The members of the Fisherfolk Club wore sou'wester hats and sou'wester coats. Tall, waterproof boots became a kind of unofficial uniform. They were proud to be fisherfolk, so they never took those boots off.

They developed a well-stocked library with books about fish and fishing. Twice a year they held seminars to teach the finer points of fishing. They published a regular newsletter. The years went by and one generation passed the leadership of their organization to those who came after them. The Fisherfolk club became larger and more efficient. Their most recent project was to develop a really attractive web site.

One day, the Fisherfolk club had a new member. That startled them a little because they didn't often get new members. What unsettled them more than anything was the kinds of questions this new member asked. Such as, "When do you go fishing?"

Well, as it turned out, the members of the Fisherfolk club had never actually caught any fish. In fact, they never went fishing. That was something earlier generations had done. The current members of the Fisherfolk club were certain their job was to keep the organization going.

They also decided they needed to take a firm stand against this new member who was asking all those embarrassing and inappropriate questions. "You'll have to leave," they said. "We feel you just don't fit in here. You obviously have a wrong-headed idea about what it means to be a member of the Fisherfolk club."

A Grandfather came out of church muttering about how the music was too loud and the children spoke too fast.

His grand-daughter was at his side and pulled on his hand and said, "Grandpa, you have your faith, help us find ours."

Lead Worship

The time is fast approaching when many rural parishes and churches will be dependant on lay people leading worship.

This will probably be built around teams of people combining their skills and talents. Doing it like this means that no one person is burdened with all the work, although it is wise to have a convener.

There are many resources available from denominational churches which can help, along with God's grace and love, and God's Spirit.

Lead Worship! is a one-year course for 'new-comers' as well as 'old hands'.

It starts with basics and aims to get more people in congregations involved in Worship.

Lead Worship! covers both the philosophy and the act of conducting worship. It has been written by a number of skilled worship leaders both lay and ordained.

Split into two sections each with six units *Lead Worship!* contains materials including prayer examples, power point examples for different ages and stages, authors, reading stories for children and sacramental worship for lay people.

Lead Worship! encourages people from the outset to become involved in a practical way by leading various aspects of worship. There are no written assignments.

We are all on spiritual journeys. We have different encounters with God.

We are spiritual storehouses of God's grace and love which the future church will call up to "LEAD WORSHIP!"

Noel Dalley, Brookside, Canterbury

If you are interested in Lead Worship! you should be able to track it down through a Methodist or Uniting Congregation in your area.

"I'm sitting here being Jesus!"

Some will recall the article in previous issue of Rural News (no.33 October 2006) entitled "Today I saw Jesus" written by my husband.

I have been encouraged to recount the corollary to that.

Being part of the voluntary Hospital Chaplaincy Team in a small community hospital means there are always connections to be discovered as we move through the Wards.

On reading my name on my ID badge the patient said " I was the one that was at the accident with your husband". As we talked, I said "I'd really like you to read what my husband wrote for our Church Newsletter about that. I'll bring it in for you tomorrow."

The next day, as I entered the Ward a nurse was quick to approach me, "Have you got something for Rangi? He has gone to Base Hospital for some tests and asked us to hold it for him."

Another Chaplain was rostered for the following day but Rangi was so chuffed with the article he recounted it to her and said, "So I'm sitting here being Jesus!"

On a subsequent admission to hospital I again spent time with Rangi and his partner who remains faithfully by his side. She told me that friends who have read the article have asked for copies but she said "No, that's mine. I'm going to have it framed with a photo of Rangi."

Rangi's mother is also known to me as one who requires frequent hospitalisation. She spoke to me about the article in a positive light, adding that her son has a heart of gold and has always had a special way with children but, sadly, has not got children of his own. Both Rangi and his Mum are happy for me to pray with them.

I ask myself, "Where is God at work in all this?"

I am in no doubt that He is there working His purposes out in the lives of these precious children of God. We can only say and write as we are moved by His Spirit and, in a rural community, you never know how far the word will spread!

Beverley Deverell

Understanding the Make-up of Rural Communities

Since arriving in Ellesmere in January 2006 I've discovered four groups of people.

Firstly, there are the **Locals**. You're a definitely a local if you were born here and have lived all your life in the district. I estimate that 60% of the people I have met in the Ellesmere district, just south of Christchurch, are third or fourth generation locals. They are people whose stories, attitudes and knowledge establish the base norms for a community. They often find change and new ideas hard to accept.

Secondly, there are the **In-Betweens**. These are people who have lived here at least 20 years, perhaps have married into a local family or bought a farm or business and have lived here at least 20 years, and preferably 40.

Thirdly, there are the **Newcomers**. Yes, you're a newcomer if you've moved into the district within the last 20 years, settled, and plan to live here for the rest of your life. Although accepted superficially, it takes a long time for Newcomers to gain the confidence of the Locals.

Lastly, there are the **Transients**. Transient means "remaining in a place only a brief time." In a district like ours "a brief time" can mean a number of years. I'm a transient. So are many teachers, bank staff, business people and those who live here but commute to Christchurch to work. Transients can pack and leave in a short time. Transients bring new ideas, and help raise the horizons for people who have lived in the district forever. Locals are glad to welcome Transients, with the new blood they bring, and encourage them to put their roots down in their new district. But they often regard them as 'outsiders'. "I used to know everyone in High Street," a Local said to me recently, "but not any more!"

The flavour of rural Canterbury has long been established by the Locals and the In-Betweens. That flavour is changing as Newcomers and Transients become a larger proportion of our communities. Towns such as Leeston, Darfield, Oxford and Amberley are located in major farming districts but are now significant dormitory towns for Christchurch.

How does this change of flavour affect individuals?

How does it affect the Church?

What is the role of the Church in building bridges between the recent arrivals and the Locals?

How do we help Church people understand the changed nature of community, so different from what many of them grew up with.

By its very nature Christian faith is about change, journey, new discoveries and things bigger than ourselves.

Mind stretching God stuff. And all in there in many of our own rural districts.

There are lots of mission possibilities for churches with their spiritual antennae switched to 'receive' mode.

Chris Bedford, Ellesmere, Canterbury

The two elderly people are sitting on the front porch and rocking away.

"I hope I die pretty soon," said one.

"Why?" asked the other.

"Because I'm getting so old, all my friends in heaven will think I didn't make it!"

Green Power and Drought Support

Church Website Initiatives

The Uniting Church in Australia's New South Wales Synod, through its website <http://nsw.uca.org.au>, offers hands-on leadership for people and congregations who want to "Go Green", and for a region facing the most extended drought in the last century.

Green Power

Headings include "Moderator exhorts congregations to go green", "Church's attack on greenhouse gas not just hot air", "Green Power Congregations" and "What kind of environmental parents are we?"

These leads, plus invaluable national and international links, show this is a Church on a Mission.

Support for Drought Victims

“Country people have a strong sense of being abandoned,” the Moderator, Mr Jim Mein, writes in *Insights* magazine – “abandoned to city-centred government policy, and abandoned in terms of the withdrawal of key services from their communities.

“But there’s no question about the resilience of country people during these times of disaster. If anything, the drought has accentuated the sense of community in rural areas, because people have found out, by working together, they’ve got a better sense of working with the issues.”

This leader affirms the people in their plight, and solicits cooperation and support from the larger church.

“What can urban people do?” Twinning of rural and urban communities is promoted, an effort is being made to develop closer links through a series of sporting, cultural and educational exchanges, and city folk are invited to show they care by spending time meeting locals and seeing the need first hand. “Consider providing accommodation for rural tertiary students, or for rural families needing respite, support the church’s “Drought Appeal” and the rural chaplaincy funding.

“There’s an incredible amount of wisdom, knowledge and self-sufficiency in local communities,” Julie Greig, a former drought support worker, writes. “We need to tap into that.... Rural people want to share the good stuff they’ve got. City churches shouldn’t see it as a one-way thing of raising money.... Rural communities have got a huge amount to offer.”

Compiled by Joyce Sasse,
www.canadianruralchurch.net

Eternal life is not so much a change of address as a change of glasses

From the Back Paddock

One moment early last spring I was a normal, healthy, bullet-proof, middle-aged farmer, who was going to live ‘for another’ 50 years and continue farming for most of them. Less than half an hour later I was being loaded into an ambulance – unconscious.

A lot can happen in half an hour or, in my case, one to two seconds.

Seizures were things I thought were reserved for epileptics or perhaps teenagers at puberty. Luckily for me I wasn’t driving, up a ladder, or operating machinery at the time or the results could have been dramatically different. I was doing that other contemporary farmer task of working in the office, and help was near at hand.

Twenty-four hours later I was back home again contemplating what could have happened and that this could happen again. I was also wrapping my mind around running a business like ours without being able to drive on the road for six, or possibly 12 months.

A few months later I was still struggling with the ‘no driving’ bit. But my most positive thoughts were and are for the family, friends and staff who have all gone out of their way to accommodate the restrictions I have faced. I truly have a tolerant wife who lives with a frustrated husband, very loyal friends who have continued to go the extra mile, and fantastic staff who probably could run our business at least as well as me, if I could bring myself to admit it.

The lesson here is that people are even more important than we think, that is, family, friends and loyal work colleagues. This isn’t an original statement but put yourself in my situation and you are reminded of it every hour of every day.

Colin Lill, Methven, Mid-Canterbury

One person with a belief is equal to a force of ninety-nine who have only interests.

John Stuart Mill



This occasional newsletter is printed and distributed by Anglican Diocese of Christchurch, PO Box 4438, Christchurch, ph 03 379 5950, fax 03 379 5954.

Contributions of news, views, insights on anything to do with the rural church and its gospel mission gratefully received.

Editor: Robyn McPhail, 17 Campbell Lane, Kerikeri 0230, 09 401 7554, fax: 09 401 7555, email: chirmac@xtra.co.nz

Thanks to all contributors and to Garth Cant and Nicola Robertson for editorial assistance.